FHR
(b)romance
Nicholas Canellakis cello
Michael Stephen Brown piano

Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)

1 Romance, Op. 36 (1874) [2:51]

Lukas FOSS (1922–2009)

2 Capriccio (1948) (edited G. Piatigorsky) [6:00]

Aaron COPLAND (1900–1990)

3 Poème (1918) [3:22]

Clara SCHUMANN (1819–1896)

Piano Concerto, Op. 7 (1836)

4 II. Romanze [4:45]

Claude DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

5 Beau soir (1891) (transcr. N. Canellakis) [2:41]

Jean SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

6 Malinconia, Op. 20 (1900) [11:24]

Alberto GINASTERA (1916–1983)

7 Pampeana No. 2, Op. 21 (1950) [8:13]

Michael Stephen BROWN (b. 1987)

Prelude and Dance (2014, rev. 2017) * [6:29]

8 Prelude [3:41]

9 Dance [2:48]

Gabriel FAURÉ (1845–1924)

10 Romance, Op. 69 (1894) [3:32]

Nicholas CANELLAKIS (b. 1984)

11 Romance à GF (2022) * [4:55]

Michael Stephen BROWN

12 35 Chords for Nick (2019) * [1:24]

Sergey RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)

13 Lied (1890) [2:06]

George GERSHWIN (1898–1937)

3 Preludes (1926) (arr. N. Canellakis *) [6:08]

14 No. 1 Allegro ben ritmato e deciso [1:35]

15 No. 2 Andante con moto e poco rubato [3:19]

16 No. 3 Allegro ben ritmato e deciso [1:13]

Don ELLIS (1934–1978)

17 Bulgarian Bulge (1969) (arr. N. Canellakis *) [3:42]

Total Timing: **[67:39]**

* Première recording

Canellakis-Brown Duo

Nicholas Canellakis *cello* | **Michael Stephen Brown** *piano*

(b)romance

It was not friendship at first sight. When I met Michael Stephen Brown at the Ravinia Festival in 2008, my 24-year-old abrasive, headstrong style initially clashed with his 21-year-old earnest naïveté. As we were forced to find common ground through the cacophonous rehearsals of Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet*, it quickly became apparent how much more alike than different we were, both as musicians and as people (are the two really different anyway?). We became fast friends, and shortly thereafter, best friends and musical collaborators. The Canellakis-Brown Duo was born, and 15 years later here we are.

The title of *(b)romance* may seem cheeky, but how could it be called anything else? Aside from featuring five *Romances* for cello and piano, the playlist is a celebration of the type of programming we love dreaming up, mixing lesser-known gems with classics alongside our own compositions and arrangements. The music runs the gamut of emotions; lyrical and sweet, serious and profound, combative and bombastic, vivacious and fun. All of these could be applied to our friendship as well!

The works that are the album's (almost) namesake are beautiful romances by Camille Saint-Saëns, Clara Schumann, Sergey Rachmaninov, Gabriel Fauré, and then my own, thrown in for good measure. Of particular note is the Clara Schumann, which is actually the second movement of her *Piano Concerto*. As a cellist, how can I not love a work that cuts out the entire orchestra and lets a solo cello shine alongside the piano?

The rest of the record is filled out with works that are very special to us. Copland's early, unpublished *Poème* is so unknown that I had to procure a copy of the handwritten score from the Library of Congress. While it may sound more like Debussy than typical Copland, classic Americana is instead served by Lukas Foss's *Capriccio*. When I was 19, I had the good fortune of playing the *Capriccio* for Foss himself after convincing the Dean of the Curtis Institute of Music to arrange the meeting. Interestingly, he didn't have a whole lot to impart other than telling me to just have a lot of fun and play it as I feel (and he signed my score, which I still cherish).

Traversing even further into the American voice are my arrangements of George Gershwin's bluesy *Preludes*, and jazz bandleader and composer Don Ellis's fiendish *Bulgarian Bulge*, originally written for big band. Set in a dizzying meter of 33 beats per bar, I fell in love with his recording and felt compelled to turn it into a virtuoso romp for cello and piano.

Sibelius's *Malinconia* is a heart-wrenchingly beautiful and original work. It has a deeply tragic backstory, written in response to the death of Sibelius's infant daughter, and is one of the most remarkable musical depictions of grief I've ever

come across. This provides a somber and profound centerpiece to our program. Coming out of the darkness is *Pampeana No. 2*, Ginastera's combustive and virtuosic homage to the vast plains of the Pampas, and to Argentinian folk music.

My work, *Romance à GF*, was written specifically for this album. I imagine the most immediate question to address would be the initials. Could GF refer to my girlfriend Arabella, who inspired me to get more serious about composing, something I loved as a child but put to the side in my adult life? Or do the letters refer to a certain great composer, whose music I adore and was influential while writing this piece? It doesn't really matter. The piece starts off like a lonely, dark music box before evolving into a sense of lyricism. It has an air of mystery, like a little dream whose meaning we'll never know.

Michael has written a number of brilliant works for me, two of which are on this album. I'm lucky to be so close to a composer that he allows me to give my honest two cents on his music – which more often than not involves whining if it's too difficult for me, and we jostle and argue until we're both happy. He has a strong musical voice while being a true collaborator. But I like to think I never impose too strongly – I only attempt to help him be his best self. You can see in the next article whether or not he agrees with that assessment.

This album can be listened to in any order one chooses, but there is a narrative journey from start to finish. The most intrepid listener may notice key relations from work to work. Indeed, each track could be seen as an individual movement that forms a cohesive whole. However one chooses to take it in, we hope it feels fresh, exciting, and that you end up loving this music as much as we do.

Nicholas Canellakis, 2023

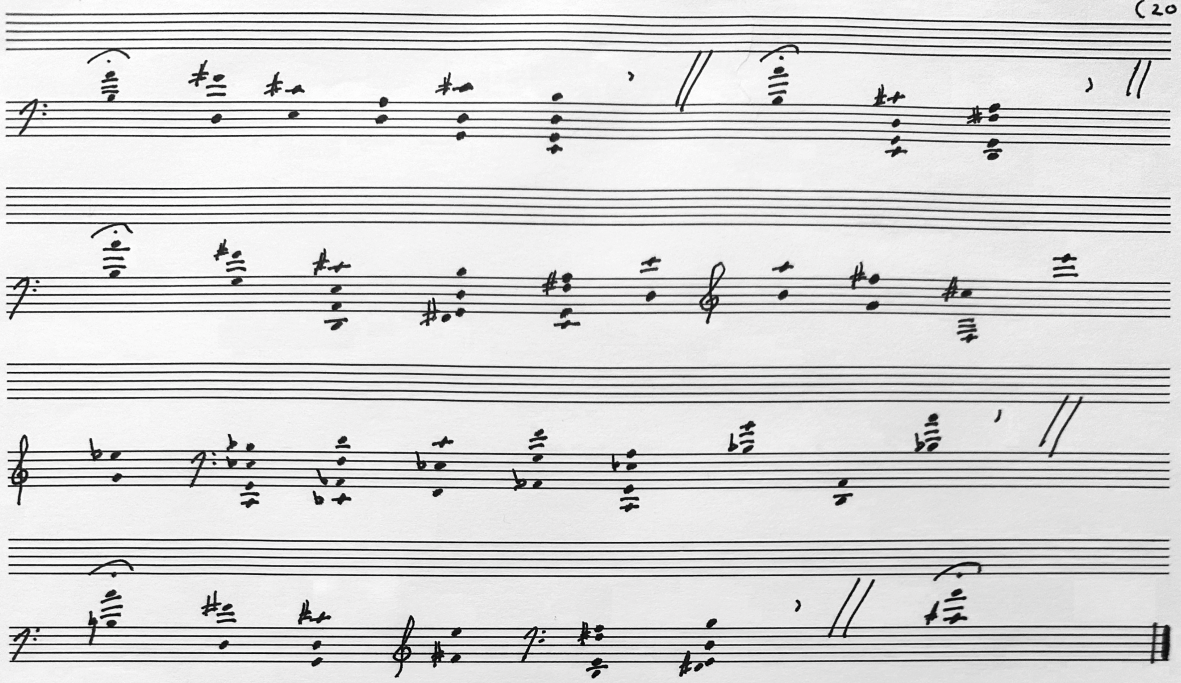
Right from the beginning of our friendship, Nick took an interest in my own music and encouraged that side of my creativity. I composed several pieces for our duo, which always turned into collaborative efforts. Understanding his sound, style, and musical tendencies – knowledge gained from years of playing together – makes writing for him an enjoyable challenge. He is one I trust with his tough and unsubtle criticisms of what could be better. We constantly argue over the definition of better, but our core values are always in alignment – believing in creating something personal, honest, raw, sometimes painful and often even humorous. Accessing these vulnerable places has unlocked fresh creative avenues for my voice – a road I'm excited to explore further and that Nick has encouraged as well.

My *Prelude and Dance* originated as a solo cello work for Nick, drawing inspiration from the Bach *Suites*. After witnessing him perform it, however, I felt left out (I have abandonment issues) and decided to rewrite the piece adding a piano part. He was unsatisfied with the first movement and didn't think it matched the level of the *Dance*. Following a period of deep breaths to recover from this blow, I scrapped the original movement and wrote an entirely new *Prelude*, which he embraced. In these scenarios (which are now common between us), I have to put my ego aside as Nick's instincts are usually right. The revised *Prelude* has a languid, searching, and exploratory nature. In contrast, the second movement, *Dance*, races forward at breakneck speed, its rhythm drawing inspiration from Bach's *Gigues*. Subtly embedded is a chord progression – Nick's leitmotif, so to speak – that appears in every piece I compose for him.

The other short piece on this album, *35 Chords for Nick*, is part of a collection that began on the eve of our friend, pianist Adam Golka's 30th birthday. Faced with having nothing to give Adam for such a momentous birthday, I composed 30 chords as a gift. Embracing this form of personalized (and frugal) gift-giving, I started creating similar chord compositions for friends celebrating milestone birthdays. *35 Chords* was composed for Nick's 35th birthday, and the series pays homage to Leonard Bernstein's evocative Anniversaries.

Michael Stephen Brown, 2023

35 Chords for Nick

Michael Brown
(2019)

* Tempo, character, dynamics are completely up to the performer — however, they should be imaginative and different every time. Arco/Pizz up to the performer's discretion.

NYC
May 20, 2019

For Nick,
Happy birthday to one of the most honest and stubborn people I know. With affection, love always, admiration and mild annoyance,
Michael

Canellakis-Brown Duo

Cellist Nicholas Canellakis and pianist-composer Michael Stephen Brown, comprising the Canellakis-Brown Duo, have been uniting their multi-disciplinary talents and honing their unique musical voice for over 15 years. They bring their affectionate, brutally honest, and infectious rapport to the stage while presenting programs celebrating the standard literature, little-known gems, and original works and arrangements.

Canellakis and Brown, who 'play with their antennae tuned to each other' (*The Washington Post*), are both longtime artists with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. They have performed together virtually all over the world, including the Baltics, the Greek Islands, Cuba, the Far East, and throughout the US.

Both artists maintain active solo careers, performing concertos with orchestras such as the Seattle, Phoenix, Albany, Virginia, Delaware, and New Haven Symphonies, Erie Philharmonic, and NFM Leopoldinum. Canellakis made his Carnegie Hall Stern Auditorium début with the American Symphony Orchestra and Brown is the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and is an upcoming artist-in-resident at Beethoven-Haus Bonn. They have performed at countless prominent music festivals, including Music@Menlo, Tanglewood, Marlboro, Saratoga, Bard, Ravinia, La Jolla, Bridgehampton, Moab, Music in the Vineyards, and Chamber Music Sedona, where Canellakis is the Artistic Director.

Brown, also a prolific composer, has written a variety of works for Canellakis, most recently a concerto called *Vortex for Cello and Strings* that will be featured on Brown's upcoming compositions album (to be released on FHR). Canellakis has composed and arranged several works for the duo across a variety of musical styles.

Canellakis is also an accomplished filmmaker. He and Brown have produced and starred in a comedy web series called 'Conversations with Nick Canellakis,' in which they conduct satirical interviews with stars of the classical music world. His latest film, *Thin Walls*, was nominated for awards at many prominent film festivals.

Canellakis plays on an outstanding Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, c. 1840, while Brown lives with his two 19th-century Steinway Concert Ds named Octavia and Daria.

When not performing, they often engage in heated games of Scrabble which tests the limits of their friendship, but always brings them back together stronger.

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Recorded, edited and produced by **Ryan Streber**
24bit, 96kHz high resolution recording,
editing and mastering

All photos by **Arabella Oz**

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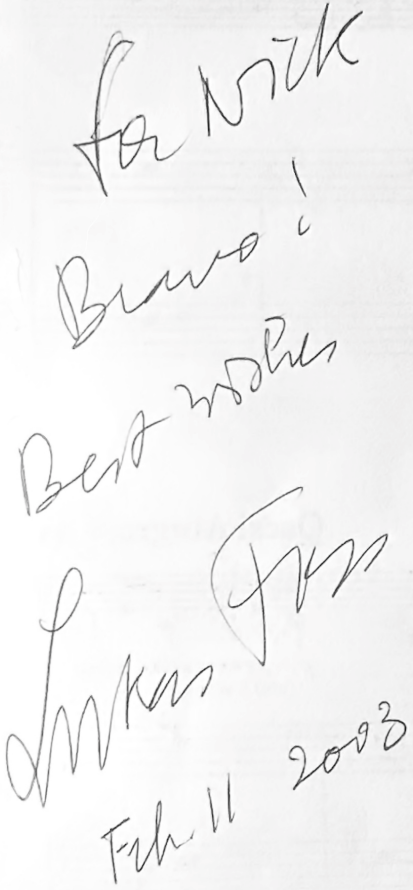
nicholascanellakis.com
michaelbrownmusic.com

Publishers:
Foss *Capriccio*: © 1948 Carl Fischer, Inc. NY
Copland *Poème*: unpublished manuscript (Library of Congress)
Sibelius *Malinconia*: © 1911 Breitkopf & Härtel
Ginastera *Pampeana No. 2, Op. 20*:
© 1952, renewed 1990 Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.
Brown *Prelude and Dance;* 35 Chords for Nick;
Canellakis *Romance à GF*: © 2022 Octavia Daria Music

Lukas FOSS

CAPRICCIO

FOR VIOLONCELLO AND PIANO



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